



WESTERN REGIONAL OFFICE
3074 Gold Canal Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95670-6166
916-852-2000 916-852-2200 (fax)
www.Ducks.org

Testimony of
Rudolph A. Rosen, Ph.D.
Director, Ducks Unlimited Western Regional Office

before the
Delta Vision Committee
Sacramento, California

December 5, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity for Ducks Unlimited (DU) to provide comments to the Delta Vision Committee on the Blue Ribbon Task Force's Delta Vision.

Ducks Unlimited is an international waterfowl and wetland habitat conservation organization with over one million members, supporters, and volunteers. The mission of DU is to conserve, restore, and manage wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl and wildlife¹. As such we are limiting our comments today to recommendations of the Task Force that pertain to rebuilding the overall health of the Delta's ecosystem, enhancing the watersheds that feed it, and protecting and restoring the resident and migratory species that depend upon it.

The Task Force takes a bold stand, offering substantive and balanced recommendations for solving the ills of the Delta. Specifically, the Task Force focuses on sustainable long-term solutions to imbalances, modifications, dysfunctions, diversions, disturbances and potential future catastrophic alterations that characterize the Delta ecosystem of today, and possibly tomorrow. The Task Force declares first and foremost that addressing the Delta ecosystem and water supply for California be co-equal goals for sustainable management. The Task Force affirms the Delta ecosystem will function well only as an integral part of a healthy estuary, and elaborates with statements about the impossibility of restoring the Delta's ecosystem to historic conditions and about actively building resiliency into the ecosystem, restoring or creating a functional ecosystem that supports the full breath of desired species, and recognizing that the true nature of the Delta's ecosystem extends to the watersheds that feed it. The Task Force's recommendations will not please all, and taken together they may not please any one individual. Resolution of critical issues such as conveyance and water management will continue to confound consensus around solutions.

¹ Ducks Unlimited has been actively conserving wetlands and associated wildlife habitat in the Delta and Suisun Marsh since DU's Western Regional Office opened in 1987. To date, we have completed just under 400 wildlife habitat improvement, management and protection projects in and adjacent to the Delta, Bay and Suisun Marsh involving over 90,000 acres of wetlands, farmlands, and upland habitats for waterfowl and other wildlife.

The Delta was once a vast tidal marsh, and as such it was among the largest and most important wetlands in North America to waterfowl and shorebirds. Today the picture is much different. About 95% of California's wetlands have been lost, and any remaining wetlands and wetlands enhancement efforts are vital to the survival of waterfowl. Of particular note, given the timing of waterfowl migration and the cycle of rainfall in the Central Valley, early migrating birds may find the Delta among the few places having water in the early fall. The Delta now provides critical winter habitat to over 1.5 million ducks and geese annually, including several species in decline or of a special nature.

Over the past century, landowners along with state and federal wildlife agencies and nongovernmental organizations like DU have worked to build wetland habitat projects in the Delta. They worked to develop conservation plans to manage patches of wildlife habitat in the Delta to sustain wintering bird populations, and this along with wildlife friendly agriculture, is why the Delta continues to support large numbers of waterfowl. The Suisun Marsh as it currently exists is largely a result of private landowners along with government working to preserve the marsh for waterfowl. While that environment is greatly changed from historic conditions it is far less altered than most of the rest of the Delta.

While this previous work was beneficial to preserving some ecological processes, especially considering the alternative of simply allowing wetlands to disappear completely, there never has been a coordinated well-designed plan to address restoring overall functions of the Delta ecosystem. Such an objective was simply beyond the capacity of those seeking to preserve a place for waterfowl in the midst of the sweeping changes in the Delta.

We hope the time has come for broader more comprehensive restoration of wetlands and improvement of ecosystem function. We want to be part of these efforts, as have our DU volunteers, and DU staff engineers and wetlands scientists been part of past wetlands restoration and protection efforts.

We recognize restructuring the current Delta ecosystem by increasing the acreage of tidal wetlands and creating habitat modifications to meet restoration goals, especially for certain fish species, may advantage or disadvantage some species of waterfowl, thus possibly increasing or decreasing the overall value of the Delta to waterfowl. Despite the uncertainty of the effect of change, improving the overall health of the Delta ecosystem, and creating more habitat diversity and resiliency to future change will provide a greater likelihood of long-term benefit to waterfowl than allowing the Delta to further degrade or suffer future catastrophic failure of in-Delta structures, climate-driven changes and new invasive species. The Delta ecosystem has been radically altered, and given the physical, chemical and biological environment today, the existing ecosystem is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Thus, we agree with the Task Force that high priority projects to improve ecosystem function should be pursued aggressively. This recommendation is one the Delta Vision Committee should pass on to the Governor and Legislature for immediate attention.

The Task Force mentions "no regrets" actions as opportunities for immediate action, but concluded there are few, if any actions that truly meet such a definition. This is probably a valid statement considering anything done for a public purpose is likely to draw some criticism if one looks hard enough. We agree with the Task Force that there are projects proposed to improve Delta ecosystem function as a result of the Delta Vision process that may differ from current proposals developed earlier by local governments or state and federal government. Such differences should not be an excuse for delay. Instead, project alternatives should be starting points for rapid resolution and initiation of the "science-based, adaptive action and management" process envisioned by the Task Force.

We believe there are projects that can be undertaken now with minimal or no controversy to expand areas of seasonal and tidal wetlands, and create connections between the estuary and the larger landscape to establish more natural diverse habitats for species.

But more to my point for today, the Task Force presents a sense of urgency to improve ecosystem function in so many ways.

A possible opportunity has now presented itself that could help accelerate implementation of species habitat enhancement. This comes in the form of potential "jobs and economic stimulus packages" being discussed by elected leaders in state and federal government right now. Ducks Unlimited is working locally and at the national level to focus some of this discussion on "green jobs" which we loosely define as on-the-ground projects of direct benefit to the environment.

In anticipation of converging an urgent need to create jobs and our ever urgent need to restore and improve the environment for species, water quality, flood control, carbon sequestration, and so on, we have assembled a package of cooperatively sponsored projects that are shovel ready now.

This Green Jobs Economic Stimulus Projects Package is initially proposed as a \$100-million package of 30 individual environmental construction projects that would create over 2,100 jobs and generate nearly \$250 million in economic output in 18 counties throughout California. Project work would take place primarily on state and federal lands through cooperative efforts between state, federal and local governments, non-governmental organizations, and private interests. Projects proposed are already in stages of initial planning through ongoing cooperative efforts between state, federal or local governments and non-governmental organizations. For some of the proposed projects, preliminary permitting is complete and some matching funding is available. As a result, these green projects can be underway quickly and will have an immediate effect on jobs and the economy.

Of this \$100 million package, about half the spending is for projects in the Bay-Delta, and most of that is tidal marsh restoration and enhancement work.

We are in the process of working with other organizations, adding to the list other shovel ready projects of environmental benefit.

My point in bringing this "green job economic stimulus" to the attention of the Delta Vision Committee is that the members of this committee will make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on implementing the Delta Vision. That Delta Vision provides a ready menu of project opportunity. If federal funds are freed up for green jobs and economic stimulus in California or if bond funds are released for immediate economic stimulus, then let's tap into that to jump start the recommendations of the Task Force to increase tidal and seasonal wetlands, to improve ecosystem health and resiliency, and to help the economy and people in need of work now.